

“HOW CAN THEY BELIVE IN THE ONE OF WHOM THEY HAVE NOT HEARD? AND
HOW CAN THEY HEAR WITHOUT SOMEONE PREACHING TO THEM?”
EVANGELIZING THE DEAF COMMUNITY BY OVERCOMING THE OBSTACLE OF
THE SPOKEN WORD

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ABSTRACT

Deaf ministries can be found in almost every church body in the United States. However, less than 10% of deaf people attend church. Evangelism to the deaf community is often hindered because of the communication barrier as well as the paradigm within the deaf culture. This paper will explore the scriptural bases for deaf evangelism, become familiar with the history of deaf culture and mission work, examine the current state of missions to the deaf community in the four major Lutheran church bodies, and expose successes and challenges that these missions face. The ultimate goal of this paper was to encourage and enable the members Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod to evangelize to the deaf community by overcoming the obstacle of the spoken word.

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INTRODUCTON

Duane King, the founder and president of Deaf Missions, wrote in “Serving with Persons Who Are Deaf”:

What is the Worst “handicap”? The worst handicap is not to be deaf, or blind or emotionally cripple, or confined to a wheelchair nor even to have all these handicaps at once. The worst handicap of all is to meet God on Judgment Day without Jesus as Savior. This is a handicap which cannot be overcome, and which is eternally devastating.¹

As followers of Christ, Christians understand the significance of this sobering statement. At one point in every Christian’s life they suffered from that “handicap.” Every human being was born dead in sin and there is nothing that anyone can do to help or save themselves. People cannot go out and find their Savior; the saving Gospel has to be given to them. For many Christians, the Savior came to them at their baptism. For others maybe a friend or family member invited them to worship or a Bible instruction course. In all cases the Holy Spirit works through the Means of Grace, the Word and Sacraments, to bring people to faith in Christ, there is no exception to the deaf community.

The people in the deaf community can be found anywhere and is made up of many different people. They may live in big cities or rural farm communities. They may work as doctors or landscapers. They may have fourth grade level or a graduate degree. Regardless of their differences they share many common experiences that bind them together and form their culture. “There are three basic components that shape deaf culture and give it cohesiveness: language, experiences, and activities.”²

In North America there are approximately two million people who are severely to profoundly deaf.³ Of those two million people there are 552,000 people who cannot understand speech.⁴ Of the hearing population in America, 44% attend church while less than 10% of the

¹ Sampley, DeAnn. *A guide to deaf ministry: let's sign worthy of the Lord*. Grand Rapids, MI.: Ministry Resources Library, 1990 pg. 37

² Sampley, pg. 33

³ "Why Deaf Ministry Is Needed." Why Deaf Ministry Is Needed. Accessed February 4, 2015. <http://www.deafadventist.org/needed.html>.

⁴ Harrington, Tom. "Deaf Statistics Tags: Deaf, Faq." Home. February 1, 2014. Accessed February 4, 2015. <http://libguides.gallaudet.edu/content.php?pid=119476&sid=1029190>.

deaf population attend.⁵ There is a great need to reach out to the deaf community because they are vastly underserved and are spread out across the nation.⁶

Since January of 1975, the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS) has sought to meet the needs of ministering to the deaf community through the WELS Committee for the Hearing Impaired Mission for the deaf and Hard of Hearing. This group however, has met its share of challenges in evangelizing the deaf community. Some of the main challenges that they have faced have been the language barrier, isolation of deaf members inside of the church, and tailoring programs to fit their communication styles.

In order to get a better grasp on the evangelism to the deaf community, this paper will: explore the scriptural bases for deaf evangelism, become familiar with the history of deaf culture and mission work, examine the current state of missions to the deaf community in the four major Lutheran church bodies, and expose successes and challenges that these missions face. The ultimate goal of this paper is to encourage and enable the members Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod to evangelize to the deaf community by overcoming the obstacle of the spoken word.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Even though, deaf evangelism and ministry in America has existed for nearly two hundred years there has not been much written on the subject in the Christian community. Much of this material is also out dated. When narrowing the search down to the Lutheran community the material is almost none existent. In Lutheran church bodies one can find newsletters and website pages devoted to the topic, but often this information is more about deaf ministry and not about deaf evangelism. The six key research topics for this paper were; challenges and obstacles in deaf evangelism, successful strategies in deaf evangelism, the impact of society on deaf culture, the unique challenges of non-verbal communication, incorporation of deaf people into a hearing worship setting, and the advantages and dangers of technology in deaf ministry.

⁵ Buck, Lori. *Signs of love: a guide for deaf ministry*. Valley Forge: Judson Press, 2014. Digital Ch. 831

⁶ Ayres, Bob, and Chad Entinger. *Deaf diaspora: the third wave of deaf ministry*. New York: iUniverse, Inc., 2004. Digital 64

On the topic of challenges and obstacles almost every book and journal resource covered at least a few points. Bob Ayres wrote about the challenges of connecting with the deaf community because of the dispersion of the deaf population across America.⁷ This information is very vital because this was not the case for many years. DeAnn Sampley wrote the exact opposite point in her 1990 book, *A Guide to Deaf Ministry*⁸. However, both Ayres and Sampley's work are both valuable. Many of the cultural differences that deaf people have are because of the shared experiences that Sampley wrote about in her book. Some of these experiences include, rejection, frustration, and phobia.⁹ Noah Butler also wrote about challenges when reaching out to the deaf community in his book, *A 21st century deaf ministry from a biblical perspective*.¹⁰ The challenges that he covered are in the realm of establishing a ministry from scratch in a hearing congregation. Understanding this challenge is very fundamental for this paper because the majority of WELS congregations are hearing congregations with no knowledge of deaf culture. The major challenge is for a congregation to have an interpreter and not a signer. An interpreter is fluent in American Sign Language and is able to facilitate conversation between the pastor, hearing members, and the deaf members, as well as sing the service. Avoiding the temptation to just make do with a signer will remove many obstacles when reaching out to the deaf community.¹¹

The successes that occurred in the various areas of deaf ministry are truly remarkable. Noah Butler III, covered many of the successes that he experienced over the years helping congregations establish deaf ministries. Throughout his book, Butler gave many helpful strategies and tips to create a successful deaf ministry. Butler stressed the importance of having a deaf ministry team, which made sure that the congregation never lost its focus. He also stressed that the pastor and members be on board with the ministry before any work had begun. Adequate funding and continuing education were also crucial to the success of deaf ministry.¹² Lori Buck also gives important insight in to setting up a deaf ministry in her book, *Signs of love:*

⁷ Ayres, Bob, and Chad Entinger. *Deaf diaspora: the third wave of deaf ministry*. New York: iUniverse, Inc., 2004.

⁸ Sampley

⁹ Sampley, pg. 33

¹⁰ Butler, Noah, and Fred Luter. *A 21st century deaf ministry from a biblical perspective*. Birmingham, Ala.: International Institute of Deaf Services, 2012.

¹¹ Butler, Digital 232

¹² Butler, Digital 258

a guide for deaf ministry.¹³ She provided many of the same insights that Butler included, but lacked specific strategy compared to Butler. Buck also incorporated some charismatic components to her ministry, which would not apply to WELS churches.

On the topic of society and its relationship to the deaf community, Ayres and Sampley offered tremendous insight to the cultural changes. Sampley describe the elements of deaf culture that bound the deaf people together,¹⁴ while Ayres covered the changes in society and how it offered deaf people many opportunities to branch out into the hearing world.¹⁵ This cultural juncture is key for reaching out to the deaf community. As the deaf community spreads out across the country churches can provide a much need social component to their lives as well as the Gospel.

Another key topic is the challenge of non-verbal communication. Sampley devoted over a third of her book to the subject of communication. One of the most challenging things to communicate in worship is a hymn. Sampley makes a strong push for translating hymns into visual stories that the deaf person can better understand. This principle can be extended into other areas of worship in order to communicate the message in more effective manner.¹⁶

On the topic of incorporation a deaf person into hearing worship both Buck and Butler heavily advocate for the use of interpreters at every function and event. This point is key to the integration of deaf people into the general membership of the congregation. By having an interpreter preset it enables deaf members to freely communicate with others and communicates to them that they are welcomed into the worship life of the congregation.¹⁷¹⁸

The final topic of the advantages and disadvantages of technology were not specifically covered in many of these resources. Bod Ayres did cover the usefulness of technology in some places in the section on the third wave of deaf evangelism. Ayres lists it as a defining trait when evangelizing to the deaf community. Ayres highlights things like, instant messaging, texting, and the internet in general, that connect deaf people spread across the country. He does issue

¹³ Buck, Lori. *Signs of love: a guide for deaf ministry*. Valley Forge: Judson Press, 2014. Digital

¹⁴ Sampley, pg. 33

¹⁵ Ayres, Digital 2363

¹⁶ Sampley, pg. 71-124

¹⁷ Butler, Digital 210

¹⁸ Buck, Digital 554

caution however, stating that technology cannot replace the touch of a friend in times of crisis or hanging out with a friend at the mall. These personal contacts are still vital when ministering to the deaf community.¹⁹

¹⁹ Ayres, Digital 2363

PART ONE: UNDERSTANDING THE SITUATION

In order to gather more information on the subject of deaf evangelism in Lutheran church bodies, interviews were conducted with people who served in deaf ministry in some capacity. Interviews were conducted with members of the WELS and the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod (LCMS). The interviews that were conducted were very fruitful. There were interviews conducted with four people in the WELS and one person in the LCMS. These interviews provided me with insight into the success and challenges of deaf ministry. However, there was no response from those contacted in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) or the Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS). For the church bodies that were not interviewed, information found on their websites was used to form conclusions.

Academic Language

American Sign Language (ASL) – Is the native language of deaf adults and is a distinct language with structure and vocabulary different from English.²⁰

Deaf - People in whom the sense of hearing is nonfunctional for the ordinary purposes of life. Input of sound is meaningless for communicational purposes. This general group is made up of two distinct classes based on the time of loss of hearing. 1. **Congenitally Deaf** – Those who were born deaf. 2. **Adventitiously Deaf** – Those who were born with normal hearing but in whom the sense of hearing became nonfunctional later in life through illness or accident. This may also be called acquired deafness.²¹

Deaf Culture - the social beliefs, behaviors, art, literary traditions, history, values, and shared institutions of communities that are affected by deafness and which use sign languages as the main means of communication. Deaf culture can be broken down into two separate groups, big “D” Deaf culture and small “d” deaf culture. **Big “D” Deaf culture** – Are people who identify themselves as culturally deaf, and have a strong deaf identity. The big D deaf tend to have attended schools/programs for the deaf. **Small “d” deaf culture** – Are people who tend to have been mainstreamed and/or never attended a school for the deaf and do not have strong connections with the deaf community.

Oral communication – “Deaf people, even those from birth, who can learn to speak and understand English by reading lips.”²²

²⁰ Sampley, pg. 23

²¹ Sampley, pg. 21

²² Sampley, pg. 24

Pidgin Sign English (PSE) – A combination of American Sign Language and Signed Exact English.

Signed Exact English (SEE) – The use of manual signs presented in the same order as spoken English.

Technology - Electronic or digital products and systems used to assist a deaf person in communicating and receiving information.

Scriptural Basis

“How can they hear without someone preaching to them?”²³²⁴ The apostle Paul’s words plainly, if no one is sharing the message to someone how can they hear it? This is a Christian’s motivation for going out and sharing God’s Word with those who do not yet know God’s saving message. God’s Word is the Christian’s motivation for taking this message to the deaf community as well. God in his infinite wisdom has chosen to work through “jars of clay,”²⁵ human beings to bring the Means of Grace to others. The Great Commission²⁶ charges us to, “Go and make disciples of all nations,” deaf people included.

The unique challenge in this mission is that people who are deaf cannot hear. Throughout the history of God’s people his message has spread by word of mouth. Verbal accounts of creation, the flood, and many others were passed down until Moses, inspired by God, recorded them in the Torah. The Psalms were written to be sung. In the New Testament, Jesus’ teaching ministry was mainly conducted through the spoken word. When the epistles were written to specific churches, they were read aloud to the congregations.²⁷

This oral tradition has carried on to the present day. Worship services revolve around the spoken word. Congregations speak responsively the confession of sins, sing hymns, read aloud the lessons, speak and recite prayers, and listen to the sermon. This environment is not

²³ Romans 10:14 “How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?”

²⁴ All Scripture quotations in this thesis are taken from The Holy Bible: New International Version, Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1984.

²⁵ 2 Corinthians 4:7 “But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.”

²⁶ Matthew 28:19-20 “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

²⁷ 2 Thessalonians 2:15 So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the teachings we passed on to you, whether by word of mouth or by letter.

welcoming to a person who cannot hear. Throughout history and in the present day there are many symbols and pictures that accompany our worship. However, many of these symbols, pictures and practices require explanation.²⁸ Holy Communion may confuse a deaf person, because they may have never heard of the word sacrament.²⁹

So, “How can they hear?” In 1 Corinthians 14:9, the apostle Paul said, “Unless you speak intelligible words with your tongue, how will they know what you are saying?”³⁰ We need to communicate with people who are deaf in an intelligible way.

In Mark 7:31-37³¹ Jesus communicates with a deaf man using some exceptional sign language. Jesus, being the true God, could have just willed that the deaf man be able to hear and speak, and it would have happened. Instead, Jesus pulls the man aside and makes a personal connection with him. He touches the man’s ears, showing him that he is going to make him hear. He spit and touched the man’s tongue, showing him that he will give him speech.³²

As followers of Jesus, Christians follow Jesus’ example. In deaf ministry there needs to be a personal connection made with each individual person who is deaf that the congregation reaches out to. This connection not only needs to be made with the pastor, but with individual members too. Through establishing this personal connection and relationship, pastors and members can more effectively fulfill the spiritual needs of the deaf people whom they are seeking to reach.

²⁸ 2 Timothy 3:14-16 But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness,

²⁹ Interview 3

³⁰ 1 Corinthians 14:9 “So it is with you. Unless you speak intelligible words with your tongue, how will anyone know what you are saying? You will just be speaking into the air.”

³¹ Mark 7:31-37 “There some people brought to him a man who was deaf and could hardly talk, and they begged him to place his hand on the man. After he took him aside, away from the crowd, Jesus put his fingers into the man’s ears. Then he spit and touched the man’s tongue. He looked up to heaven and with a deep sigh said to him, “Ephphatha!” (which means, “Be opened!”). At this, the man’s ears were opened, his tongue was loosened and he began to speak plainly. Jesus commanded them not to tell anyone. But the more he did so, the more they kept talking about it. People were overwhelmed with amazement. ‘He has done everything well,’ they said. “He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak.”

³² Mark 7:32-34 After he took him aside, away from the crowd, Jesus put his fingers into the man’s ears. Then he spit and touched the man’s tongue. He looked up to heaven and with a deep sigh said to him, “Ephphatha!” (which means, “Be opened!”).

Through establishing individual relationships with members of the deaf community those ministering must also remember Paul's encouragement in 1 Corinthians 9:19-23³³ to, "become all things to all men, So that by all possible means I might save some." In order to evangelize to the deaf community those reaching out to the deaf community need to become like a member of the deaf community. People intending to minister to the deaf should, learn sign language, attend deaf events, learn about the history and culture of those they are serving.

Through study of scripture, God's Word is clear that evangelism to the deaf community is just as essential as evangelism to any other group of people. It is also clear that the motivation for reaching out to the deaf community is out of love for the lost.

History of Deaf Culture in America

In comparison to all of the different cultures in the world, American deaf culture is relatively young. The birth of deaf culture in American can be traced back to Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet, a pastor from Hartford, Connecticut. In May of 1814, Gallaudet watched a deaf neighbor, Alice Cogswell, play outside with the neighborhood children. Gallaudet attempted to communicate with her by pointing at his hat and wrote H-A- T in the dirt. Alice understood him and this inspired Gallaudet to teach her to communicate. Gallaudet wanted to teach how to communicate so he could tell her about her Savior. Gallaudet would lie awake at night thinking about how Alice might never be able to know who Jesus is.³⁴ Alice's father, Dr. Mason Cogswell, paid for Gallaudet to travel to Europe to find new methods to instruct Alice.³⁵

At the time that Gallaudet traveled to Europe, there was major change in the education of people with disabilities occurring. Until the late 1700's it was popular thought that people with disabilities, deaf people included, were mentally ill. This philosophy led to the mistreatment of people with disabilities, some were tortured, some were killed, and others were placed into institutions. This perception was drastically changed by Jean-Marc Gaspard Itard. Itard was a

³³ 1 Corinthians 9:19-23 "Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.

³⁴ Taylor, Dawn. "Deaf Culture and History." Lecture, American Sign Language I from Delta College, Bay City, August 23, 2006.

³⁵ "The Legacy Begins." - Gallaudet University. Accessed November 2, 2014.
http://www.gallaudet.edu/history/the_legacy_begins.html.

military surgeon and, in 1800, he was appointed Chief Physician at the National Institution for Deaf-Mutes in Paris. Itard's work with the child known as "The Wild Boy of Aveyron" won him an international reputation, and he is recognized today as one of the founding fathers of special education.³⁶

The account of the "Wild Boy" began in 1799. There were three French sportsmen were exploring a wood in southern France when they came upon a young boy.

They guessed that he was about eleven or twelve years old, and he was filthy, naked, and covered with scars. The boy ran from them, but he was caught when he stopped to climb a tree. The sportsmen brought him to a nearby village and gave him over into the care of a widow. As the story of his capture spread, local residents began reporting that a young naked boy had been seen in the woods five years earlier. It was presumed that he had lived alone for many years, and that he had survived by eating whatever he could find or catch. The boy escaped from the widow, and spent the next winter roaming the woods alone. He was eventually recaptured and placed in safe custodial care. An official in the French government heard about him, and suggested that he be taken to Paris where he could be studied as an example of the human mind in its primitive state. However, the prominent Parisian physicians who examined him declared that he was not "wild" at all; their collective opinion was that the boy was mentally deficient, and that he had been recently abandoned by his parents. The famous psychiatrist Philippe Pinel put it succinctly when he said that the boy was in fact "an incurable idiot." Itard disagreed. He believed that the boy had survived alone in the woods for at least seven years, citing as evidence his "profound aversion to society, its customs, and its artifacts." He asserted that his apparent mental deficiency was entirely due to a lack of human interaction. Moreover, he believed that this could be overcome. He brought the boy-whom he eventually named "Victor"--to The National Institution for Deaf-Mutes, and devoted the next five years to an intensive, individualized educational program.³⁷

This was the first example of an Individual Education Program (IEP), and the beginning of modern special education. Itard did improve Victor's communication skills, but Victor never became "normal." "The fact that Itard failed to make Victor "normal" is relatively unimportant to this story. The important thing is that he *tried*. He was the first physician to declare that an enriched environment could compensate for developmental delays caused by heredity or previous deprivation. Up to this time, it had been assumed that mentally retarded people were uneducable."³⁸

³⁶ Human Intelligence: Jean-Marc Gaspard Itard. Accessed February 14, 2015.
<http://www.indiana.edu/~intell/itard.shtml>

³⁷ Human Intelligence: Jean-Marc Gaspard Itard.

³⁸ Human Intelligence: Jean-Marc Gaspard Itard.

While in Europe Gallaudet came in contact with the Braidwood School for the deaf in England. Braidwood taught their students oral communication and expected their students to read lips. However, they did not teach Gallaudet their methods because he was not able to pay the fees that they requested.³⁹

While in England, Gallaudet met Abbe Sicard, the director of the Institut Royal des Sourds-Muets in Paris, France. After their meeting, Sicard brought Gallaudet to her school in Paris to study their methods. When Gallaudet was ready to travel back to America, Sicard released one of her teachers, Laurent Clerc, to assist him in opening a school. When they returned to America to establish a school for the deaf based on the sign language methods he learned in Paris. The sign language that Gallaudet and Clerc taught is now what we call American Sign Language. This approach produced a high rate of literacy among deaf people.⁴⁰

In 1857 Gallaudet's son Edward established a school for the deaf in Washington D.C. In 1864 President Abraham Lincoln signed a charter establishing the school as a college. The college was named after his father and is now known as Gallaudet University, the only deaf university in the world.⁴¹

The progress that was made in deaf education did not last long. In the 1870's the Oral communication movement gained prominence in education. This change caused the illiteracy rate among deaf people to mushroom.⁴² This change affected all aspects of deaf culture, except one.

There has been one realm where sign language always continued to be used, all over the world, despite the changed habits and proscriptions of educators – in religious services for the deaf. Priests and other never forgot the souls of their deaf parishioners, learned sign ...and conducted services in sign, right through the endless wrangles over oralism and the eclipse of sign in secular education.⁴³

The oral communication movement had a profound impact on deaf culture that is still being felt today.

³⁹ The Legacy Begins

⁴⁰ The Legacy Begins

⁴¹ The Legacy Begins

⁴² Sampley, pg. 34

⁴³ Sampley, pg. 34

It wasn't until the 1960's that there was a resurgence of sign language based education in America. In 1969 as the sign language education movement was gaining ground, America was hit by a Rubella epidemic. If a mother contracted Rubella during pregnancy the child would be affected drastically. During this time more than 20,000 babies were born with various birth defects, of which many were left deaf.⁴⁴ This epidemic drew much needed attention to the deaf community and the need for sign language education.

The sign language movement climaxed in March 1988 at Gallaudet University in the "Deaf President Now" protests. The protests started because the Governing Board of the University chose a hearing candidate over an equally qualified deaf candidate. This injustice gave the deaf community a chance to expose the discrimination that they had been experiencing for hundreds of years.⁴⁵

Many people who are deaf were not treated equally with hearing people in the work place. They were held at entry-level positions far below their hearing peers because of discrimination. "Whether intentional or not, employers may neglect people who are deaf primarily because the deafness is not visible. While great strides are being made to accommodate people with other disabilities – such as laws to require wheelchair ramps – most employers still ignore the needs of the deaf."⁴⁶

The "Deaf President Now" protest lasted for six days, in which the students took over the Gallaudet campus and brought its operations to a halt. The Students had four demands from the Gallaudet Governing Board. The Demands were that; "Elisabeth Zinser must resign and a deaf person selected president; Jane Spilman must step down as chairperson of the Board of Trustees; deaf people must constitute a 51% majority on the Board; and there would no reprisals against any student or employee involved in the protest."⁴⁷ The hearing candidate stepped down and I. King Jordan was hired as the first deaf President of Gallaudet University.⁴⁸

⁴⁴ Ayres, pg 22

⁴⁵ "The History Behind DPN: What Happened..." - Gallaudet University. Accessed January 26, 2015. http://www.gallaudet.edu/dpn_home/issues/history_behind_dpn.html.

⁴⁶ Sampley, pg. 35

⁴⁷ "The History Behind DPN: What Happened..."

⁴⁸ "The History Behind DPN: What Happened..."

The “Deaf President Now” protest had many lasting effects on the deaf community and culture. The “Deaf President Now” protest movement grew into the “Deaf Pride” and Deaf Power” movements. These movements continue to advocate for the deaf community and equal rights in the hearing community.⁴⁹

These historic events helped to shape deaf culture in America. There are also three social components of Deaf culture that shape deaf culture and give it cohesiveness; language, experiences, and activities.⁵⁰

The most impactful of these social components is the shared language, American Sign Language (ASL). Through ASL people who are deaf can freely communicate with one another and this helps form a closer bond. American Sign Language is one of the fundamental parts of their culture.⁵¹

Because of their disability people who are deaf also have many shared experiences. They have experienced rejection from the hearing community because they are different. They are often paranoid that they are doing something wrong or might be perceived as stupid. Deaf people experience frustration when communication breaks down. These shared experiences and many others help to strengthen their cultural bond.⁵²

Activities such as deaf clubs, deaf schools, and community centers are important to the deaf community because people are usually scattered over a wide area. These activities and institutions help to remove the feeling of isolation and promote socialization.⁵³

History of Lutheran Mission Work among the Deaf

Mission work among the deaf is not isolated to any one specific Lutheran Synod. Each Lutheran Church body approaches deaf ministry in their own way. In some ways they are very similar, and in others they are very different.

The Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod

The Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod’s (WELS) Mission work official began, through the work of a layman, William E. Hughes. Hughes became a WELS member in 1954,

⁴⁹ "The History Behind DPN: What Happened..."

⁵⁰ Sampley, pg. 33

⁵¹ Sampley, pg. 33

⁵² Sampley, pg. 33

⁵³ Sampley pg. 33

after he was invited to attend an Easter service at Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, in Beaver Dam, Wisconsin.⁵⁴ Hughes desired to become a WELS pastor, but instead served the military in Korea from 1956 to February 1958.⁵⁵ After his military service, Hughes married and became a Sunday school teacher at his congregation. In 1965 his wife contracted Rubella Missals while she was pregnant. The doctor explained to Mr. and Mrs. Hughes that the baby could be born with birth defects and that they could choose to have the pregnancy terminated. After listening to all of the reasons why they should terminate the pregnancy, Mr. and Mrs. Hughes knew it would be wrong and kept the child.⁵⁶

In September of 1965, Stephen Hughes was born without any visible birth defects. This joy, however, turned to tears fifteen months later when they realized Stephen was born with a nerve deafness that could not be fixed with surgery.⁵⁷

When Stephen was old enough, he attended his mother's Sunday school class. She quickly realized, however, that his Sunday school education would take more attention than the other children. She then approached the Sunday school superintendent and the Christian Day school board to request a separate class for children with special needs, and the board approved the request.⁵⁸

After starting the special needs class, Mr. and Mrs. Hughes realized the material they were using was inadequate for Stephen. They discussed the matter with their pastor and he prompted them to write to the Synod Office in Milwaukee about the matter. In the response they found out that there was only very limited material and no programs for hearing impaired instruction and that their concern was noted.⁵⁹

In September of 1975, William Hughes received a letter from the WELS Special Ministries Board, asking him if he would chair a study committee for the hearing impaired. Hughes accepted the call and the committee began its work in January of 1976. In September of 1977 Committee was moved from the status of a study committee to an active work committee.

⁵⁴ Hughes, William E. *By The Grace of God – A History of the Committee for the Hearing impaired*. Nov. 28, 1978 Pg.1

⁵⁵ Hughes, pg.1

⁵⁶ Hughes, pg. 3

⁵⁷ Hughes, pg.3

⁵⁸ Hughes, pg.4

⁵⁹ Hughes, pg.4

In 1995 the committee changed its name to the Mission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (MDHH).⁶⁰

Throughout the years, this committee has impacted the WELS in many positive ways. The MDHH committee has increased awareness of the needs of the deaf and hard of hearing through seminars and publications. They have sponsored Sign Language classes and clubs at the WELS colleges of ministry. MDHH has also produced materials to assist pastors and congregations in ministering to the deaf.

One particular publication that the MDHH releases is a newsletter called “Open to all.” This publication started in the fall of 1989, and was originally called “Ephphatha,” which comes from Mark 7:34⁶¹ and means “be opened.” Through “Open to all,” the MDHH committee is able to share helpful insights and important information with WELS congregations, members, and schools.⁶²

Another positive impact is 46 churches in the WELS that offer signed services.⁶³ Many of these signed services are not held on a weekly basis and some are only held upon request.

Some of the successes that the WELS has experienced in the mission field of deaf evangelism. On An additional positive was the holding of deaf Bible Studies. Deaf bible studies provide a safe and welcoming environment for deaf participants to ask questions and grew together in fellowship.⁶⁴ Bible studies led by lay people can also be of great benefit.⁶⁵ Having lay leaders in deaf Bible studies can help spread out the time commitment needed for deaf ministry and boost interaction between hearing and deaf members.

⁶⁰ Hughes, pg.4

⁶¹ Mark 7:34 “. He looked up to heaven and with a deep sigh said to him, ""Ephphatha!"" (which means, "Be opened!")”

⁶² *The Mission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing History Section 2*. Acquired from the Mission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing

⁶³ Nehls, Beverly. "Mission to the Deaf and Hard of Hearing." 201411 MDHH Interpreted Services Looped Churches.doc. January 15, 2015. Accessed January 23, 2015.
https://connect.wels.net/AOM/ps/CSM/mdhh/_layouts/WordViewer.aspx?id=/AOM/ps/CSM/mdhh/Group Documents/04. Deaf ministry, signed services, looped churches/201411 MDHH interpreted services looped churches.doc&Source=https://con.

⁶⁴ Interview 3

⁶⁵ Interview 2

The WELS has also experienced successes in friendship evangelism. In some congregations one deaf member invited friends to attend Bible study or church.⁶⁶ These friendships provide a bridge to share the Gospel, which is important in breaking down the communication barrier.

In order to experience these successes a congregation needs to be prepared to evangelize to the deaf community.⁶⁷ Having an interpreter and not a signer is of vital importance.⁶⁸ An interpreter is fluent in American Sign Language. Interpreters are able to converse with deaf people on a deeper level without any difficulty. Signers are able to practice signing services and sermons but are often unable to translate fluently. This preparedness was proven at the funeral of a WELS deaf member. The church supplied an interpreter for the funeral and because of the message they heard many became members.⁶⁹

The WELS has also had much success with its deaf publications. “Open to All” provides a much needed means to share pertinent information with many people spread out over a large area. The deaf catechism, *By Grace Alone*, is an excellent tool for teaching the truths of God’s Word.⁷⁰ *By Grace Alone* is written in a way that is easy for deaf people to understand and that avoids English idioms that might be confusing.

The religious sign dictionary, *Sign to the Lord a New Song*, was also a great success for the WELS. The dictionary is the largest published religious sign dictionary, and it offers interpreters an excellent resource for those signs which they may not know.⁷¹ The sign dictionary helps signers define complex signs and concepts using simpler signs as a foundation.

The WELS has had many successes in deaf evangelism and ministry, but they have also faced many challenges as well. The greatest challenge to overcome is the language barrier. Most of the WELS congregations do not have interpreters available every Sunday. When a deaf person attends these churches they are unable to understand the spoken word and often never return.⁷²

⁶⁶ Interview 1

⁶⁷ Butler, Digital 894

⁶⁸ Butler, Digital 254

⁶⁹ Interview 2

⁷⁰ Interview 2

⁷¹ Interview 1

⁷² Interview 1

The language barrier also leads to another challenge, isolation. When deaf people attend church they are often separated from the rest of the congregation, not only because of language itself, but also because of the needs of the language. Interviewee one, stated, “They often sit by themselves with the interpreter.”⁷³ Deaf people have their own bible studies and gatherings, but with a small deaf population, little socialization is offered for the members who are deaf.⁷⁴ The apostle Paul states the importance of being united as members of one body in 1 Corinthians 12:12-30.⁷⁵ As members of Christ’s body believers need to be united, and sharing in each other’s gifts.

The Lutheran Church Missouri Synod

The Lutheran Church Missouri Synod’s (LCMS) involvement with the deaf community dates back to the 1870’s. Following the Civil War the LCMS wanted to provide homes for the children left fatherless after the war. So congregations in Michigan founded the Lutheran Children’s Friend Society (LCFS) in 1873. Rev. Heugli led the efforts of the society to establish the LCFS orphanage in Detroit.⁷⁶

The board for the orphanage called Rev. George Speckhardt as its first director. Speckhardt was a teacher for the deaf in Germany prior to becoming a Lutheran pastor.

⁷³ Interview 1

⁷⁴ Interview 2

⁷⁵ 1 Corinthians 12:12-30 “The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body--whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free--and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. Now the body is not made up of one part but of many. If the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. And if the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. If they were all one part, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, but one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, “I don’t need you!” And the head cannot say to the feet, “I don’t need you!” On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor. And the parts that are unrepresentable are treated with special modesty, while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. And in the church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, also those having gifts of healing, those able to help others, those with gifts of administration, and those speaking in different kinds of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret?”

⁷⁶ “History of LCMS Deaf Missions.” History of LCMS Deaf Missions. Accessed November 7, 2014. <http://www.deafjesus.org/html/history.html>.

Speckhardt served a congregation in northern Michigan before becoming the director of the orphanage and in that congregation he taught two deaf girls. The parents of the deaf girls and Speckhardt wanted to continue their education, so they asked to the board to let the girls reside at the school to continue their education. The board agreed and the word spread to other deaf families. Within one year the board recognized the mission opportunity that they had and reorganized the orphanage to be the Lutheran Institute for the Deaf.⁷⁷

Twenty years after the founding of the Lutheran Institute for the Deaf in Detroit, one of its graduates, Edward Pahl, asked the current school's director, Daniel H. Uhlig to help address the spiritual needs of deaf adults. Uhlig reached out to Rev. Augustus Reinke the Pastor at Bethlehem Lutheran Church in Chicago to assist. Reinke and Pahl started Congregational ministry for Deaf people on Sunday March 4, 1894. Within two years Rev. Reinke was regularly ministering to deaf people in St. Louis, Louisville, and many other cities.⁷⁸

At the 1896 convention of the LCMS in Fort Wayne, Indiana, the delegates had the opportunity to witness the fruit of Rev. Reinke's ministry. Reinke, along with some of his deaf members, signed the worship service. At the convention that the LCMS adopted the Deaf Missions as an official mission program of the Synod. Reinke was elected the Chairman and within six months four other men were called into full-time work in the mission.⁷⁹

At the 1944 LCMS convention in Saginaw, Michigan, the Synod wanted to recognize the 50th anniversary of the Synod's Ministry to the deaf. They passed a resolution to raise funds to establish an east coast school for the deaf. The money was raised over a four year period. A group of pastors and laymen from the New York area began to meet about setting up the school in 1947. The group incorporated as the charitable, non-profit corporation, Lutheran Friends of the Deaf (LFD) in 1949. LFD purchased the 86-acre "Sefton Manor" in 1951. The School was named Mill Neck Manor Lutheran School and opened with 19 boys and girls enrolled. In 1956, Mill Neck Manor was fully accredited by New York State. Over the years the LFD grew in to the

⁷⁷ "History of LCMS Deaf Missions."

⁷⁸ "History of LCMS Deaf Missions."

⁷⁹ "History of LCMS Deaf Missions."

Mill Neck Family of Service Organizations. As a recognized Service Organization with in the LCMS, the LFD develops and distributes resources for deaf ministry. ⁸⁰

The Deaf Mission program was administered by a separate board from its founding until 1965. In 1965 Deaf Missions became part of the unified Board of Missions. In 1973 the Synod transferred the administrative responsibility to the districts of the synod and to retain the responsibility for the policy and training of professional workers. The North Atlantic Deaf congregations met in 1950 to draw up plans for what would later be known as the Lutheran Deaf Mission Society (LDMS). ⁸¹

At its peak in 1994, The LCMS had 63 primarily Deaf congregations in 25 states, which were served by 30 full-time pastors or missionaries, with 3 pastors in part-time ministry. There were approximately 200 “hearing” congregations had regular interpreted ministry for the deaf. In 2012 profoundly deaf communicant members in the LCMS numbered about 8,000. The LCMS experienced a large decline in deaf membership, congregation, and pastors since its peak in 1994. The LCMS currently has 10 primarily Deaf congregations and 2 Schools for the deaf. ⁸²

In the LCMS there have been many successes in ministering and evangelizing to the deaf culture. One of their greatest assets is the Deaf schools that they have been able to establish and maintain. ⁸³ Having these resources at their disposal gives them the ability to work with the deaf community on a deeper level.

The Deaf Institute of Theology is also a great success. This program allows the LCMS to train deaf members to become pastors. The Institute operates out of the LCMS Seminary in St. Louis, Missouri. This program has the ability to train pastors who are already living in the deaf culture and community. The Program however, has not had any enrolled students in the last few years. ⁸⁴

Another great success for the LCMS is the Web site Deaf Pah. The Word or sign Pah has the meaning of “finally” or “success.” Through this web site the LCMS is able to educate deaf

⁸⁰ "Mill Neck Family of Organizations." Mill Neck Family of Organizations RSS. Accessed October 17, 2014. <https://millneck.org/our-services/deaf-ministry/>.

⁸¹ "History of LCMS Deaf Missions."

⁸² "Directory of LCMS Deaf Missions." Directory of LCMS Deaf Missions. Accessed October 23, 2014. <http://www.deafjesus.org/directory/index.htm>.

⁸³ "Directory of LCMS Deaf Missions." Directory of LCMS Deaf Missions. Accessed October 23, 2014. <http://www.deafjesus.org/directory/index.htm>.

⁸⁴ Interview 5

lay people and provide resources for ministering to the deaf for hearing congregations. One of the resources is a PDF version of a deaf Catechism. There are also courses offered on the web site that serve as a pre-seminary program for the LCMS. Classes offered on the site range from Bible History, to the Book of Concord, to New Testament Greek.⁸⁵

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Until the year 2000, The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) ministered to the deaf on a congregational level. Individual congregations in the ELCA have been ministering to the deaf community for many years. Historic Trinity Lutheran Church in Reading, Pennsylvania, has been ministering to the deaf since 1920.⁸⁶ The ELCA saw a need for a nationwide organization to help in their ministry to the deaf community. In the year 2000 the ELCA formed the Evangelical Lutheran Deaf Association (ELDA) in order to provide support in Education and information sharing among the churches and ministry services within the ELCA. ELDA accomplishes these goals through ministry conferences which ELDA holds every two years. ELDA also distributes a newsletter to keep the churches networked and communicating with each other.⁸⁷ The ELCA has six primarily deaf congregations in the United States of America.⁸⁸

The Evangelical Lutheran Synod

The Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS) is the smallest of the four major Lutheran church bodies. The author was unable to find any official Synod missions for the deaf. The ELS College of ministry, Bethany Lutheran College, does offer an American Sign Language course. The ELS and the WELS are in fellowship and often share in mission work. The ELS may make use of WELS Mission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing.

⁸⁵ "Deaf PAH!" Deaf Pah Classes. Accessed November 10, 2014. <http://www.deafjesus.org/courses/courses.html>.

⁸⁶ "Deaf Ministry - Historic Trinity Lutheran Church." Historic Trinity Lutheran Church. Accessed January 15, 2015. <http://www.oldtrinity.org/deaf-ministry/>.

⁸⁷ "ELDA About Us." About Us. Accessed November 12, 2014. <http://www.eldadeaf.org/about.html>.

⁸⁸ "ELCA Deaf Congregations" Accessed December 1, 2014. http://download.elca.org/ELCA Resource Repository/Deaf_Congregations_DM.pdf.

PART TWO: CURRENT WORK BEING DONE IN THE FOR MAJOR LUTHERAN SYNODS

In all four of the major Lutheran Synods, there is some form of work with the deaf community being conducted. Much of the work being done is a continuation of the programs and plans that they have worked on in the past.

The Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod

The Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod is continuing to serve the needs of the deaf community through the WELS Mission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing. The MDHH committee continues to publish its newsletter, “Open to All.” The committee also updates its publications for instance, the adult Bible instruction course, “By Grace Alone.” MDHH also continues to inform the members and pastors of the WELS of the services that they offer to assist in ministry to the deaf and hard of hearing.⁸⁹

The MDHH is also developing an American Sign Language course to be taught at Martin Luther College. The course will introduce students to basic ASL signs and grammar, as well as incorporate religious signs and education on Deaf culture. The course is planned to start in 2016.⁹⁰

The Lutheran Church Missouri Synod

The Lutheran Church Missouri Synod is continuing to make use of the programs which they have established. The LCMS is continuing to service the needs of their deaf ministry through the work of the 10 Deaf churches and two schools, as well as other service organizations. The Deaf Theological institute also continues to be offered to train up deaf pastors for service in LCMS congregations.⁹¹

⁸⁹ Duve, Aaron. Member of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod Mission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing.

⁹⁰ Duve

⁹¹ Interview 5

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America maintains its work with the deaf community through their Evangelical Lutheran Deaf Association. ELDA is increasing awareness of deaf ministry needs through its newsletter and conferences that it holds.⁹²

The Evangelical Lutheran Synod

The Evangelical Lutheran Synod continues to offer classes in American Sign Language at its College of ministry, Bethany Lutheran College.⁹³

⁹² "ELDA Information." ELDA Information. Accessed January 4, 2015. <http://www.eldadeaf.org/information.html>.

⁹³ "AMSL - American Sign Language Courses." AMSL. Accessed November 1, 2014. <http://www.blc.edu/courses/amsl>.

PART THREE: ADDRESSING THE ISSUE

Challenges and Obstacles in Deaf Evangelism

One of the challenges when evangelizing to the deaf community, is the communication barrier. The spoken word can be the biggest deterrent to people who are deaf. Many people assume that people who are deaf can read English, so they are often confused when handed printed materials meant for hearing people. Interviewee number one said, “You can’t take hearing programs and make them apply to people who are deaf, programs need to be tailored to the people who are deaf you are serving. It requires someone to walk with them and help them remove barriers.”⁹⁴

The communication barrier also affects worship. People who are deaf often have a difficult time following the order of service. Interviewee number two said, “Deaf people don’t get why we have the order of worship, liturgy. They understand the reasons for the things that we say. For example when we sing “Holy, holy, holy” it seems redundant.”⁹⁵ The aesthetics of auditory worship often don’t translate well into American Sign Language. This can be frustrating for deaf people attending the service.

The general function of worship can be barrier as well. Often people who are deaf “don’t know why everyone is speaking is speaking all of a sudden. Deaf people feel that they don’t fit in. Sometimes they just sit through the worship to get to the sermon.”⁹⁶ Deaf people also may become frustrated because the songs take a lot of time.⁹⁷ Because of experiences like these people who are deaf might not feel welcomed at worship.

Certain concepts are also difficult to communicate because of the communication barrier. After a worship service, a deaf member asked the pastor what a sacrament was.⁹⁸ These difficult concepts often require more explanation to translate the meaning of the term into a visual language like ASL.

The major challenge when evangelizing and ministering to the deaf is isolation. Isolation of deaf people occurs in congregations because they often sit by themselves to be closer to the

⁹⁴ Interview 1

⁹⁵ Interview 2

⁹⁶ Interview 3

⁹⁷ Interview 3

⁹⁸ Interview 3

interpreter and have no interaction with the hearing members of the congregation.⁹⁹ “It is more than a language barrier. It takes personal relationships because of the isolation; someone has to be committed to taking care of their spiritual needs. They don’t need a presentation.”¹⁰⁰ Some of these barriers are caused by the lack of people that know the language when deaf people come to the church. Hearing people are often unsure of how to interact with deaf people which adds to the Isolation.¹⁰¹

Isolation can also occur when there are only a few deaf people attending a service at a congregation. Interviewee number two said, “It is hard to start a deaf ministry with only a few people. If there are only one or two deaf people it lacks the social aspect.”¹⁰² The social aspect of worship is very important. Interacting with other believer’s give individuals not only support in their lives of faith, but also the opportunity to mature and grow in their faith.

Another obstacle that stands in the way of deaf evangelism is not having a means to contact or reach out to them.¹⁰³ Because they are dispersed all over the country connecting with deaf people in your community can be difficult.¹⁰⁴ Deaf community doesn’t always want to be involved with the hearing culture either. They may feel that a hearing person is telling them what to do. The deaf community is close knit, and hesitant of people coming in.¹⁰⁵

Successful Strategies in Deaf Evangelism

One of the most important things to do when establishing a deaf ministry is to have a plan. Butler stressed the importance of having certain principle set in place for ministry success.¹⁰⁶ The principles that he shared was the V.I.S.A. model, which stands for; V-vision, I- Integrity, S- structure, and A- accountability. Establishing a vision for you ministry is vital, because it tells you what you want to accomplish with it and why it is important. Integrity is important in any mission field. Stressing the integrity of the program demonstrates that it is

⁹⁹ Interview 1

¹⁰⁰ Interview 1

¹⁰¹ Interview 3

¹⁰² Interview 2

¹⁰³ Interview 2

¹⁰⁴ Ayres, Digital 236

¹⁰⁵ Interview 2

¹⁰⁶ Butler, Digital 574

dependable and trust worthy. Structure provides consistency and order to the ministry. The apostle Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 14:40 “Everything must be done in a fitting and orderly way.” Accountability is the most important principle because without it the whole ministry can fall apart.¹⁰⁷ When establishing a deaf ministry this model can serve as a great guide to the general evangelism and ministry strategies of the church.

In order to overcome the communication and isolation barrier a congregation must have a fluent interpreter at every service and event.¹⁰⁸ Butler stated, “The roll of a deaf ministry is not only to provide interpreted services, but also to provide an environment where Deaf members and hearing members can worship together in harmony with out separations or divisions”¹⁰⁹ A fluent interpreter can assist the deaf members not only by interpreting the service in a way that deaf people can understand, but also serve as a bridge to communicate with hearing members and pastors.

Pastors and interpreters also have to work together to overcome the communication barrier. Sampley stated that, “It helps to know a little Greek. Because it is impossible to translate something into another language until we understand it in its original language.”¹¹⁰ WELS pastors are all trained in the original languages of the bible and can help interpreters understand the original meaning of the words and thoughts. The religious sign dictionary *Sign to the Lord a New Song* can also help with difficult terms and concepts.¹¹¹

To further break down this barrier, ministries need to incorporate deaf people into other areas of the ministry. One ministry in the WELS has deaf members in the choir. They sign the songs which adds visual element to the songs the choir sings.¹¹² This also allows hearing members to interact with deaf members in other settings like choir practice.

In deaf ministry a clear distinction needs to be made between a signer and an interpreter. A signer is someone who has knowledge of sign language, but is not fluent. Signers often have to have the material they are signing in advance and are not able to interpret effectively off the cuff.

¹⁰⁷ Butler, digital 640-680

¹⁰⁸ Interview 3

¹⁰⁹ Butler, Digital 232

¹¹⁰ Sampley, pg. 72

¹¹¹ Interview 1

¹¹² Interview 2

An interpreter is fluent in American Sign Language and can interpret off the cuff.¹¹³ It is also important to note that interpreters can also benefit from having materials in advance too. There might be a lag in communication if the interpreter has to interpret off of the cuff without a printed manuscript.¹¹⁴

In order to break down the barrier of a means to contact or reach out the deaf community, it will take personal relationships. People who are deaf need to know that someone has to be committed to taking care of their spiritual needs. They don't need a presentation.¹¹⁵ Congregations need to make an effort to reach out to people who are deaf by establishing relationships with them in their community.¹¹⁶ "No matter how much your ministry advertises, advertising may not be enough to draw deaf people to your ministry. If you really want to reach them you have to go where they are and draw them in. Your ministry should become immersed in the deaf community."¹¹⁷ Interviewee number one described the motivation to share the Gospel in a very powerful way when he said, "At the Tower of Babel God made it so that the people could not communicate, he frustrated their language. But ever since Pentecost, people all over the world are erasing communication barriers for the sake of the gospel." There are also many ways that you can contact deaf people through the internet on deaf blogs and websites.¹¹⁸

The Impact of Society on Deaf Culture

In some ways, the change in society has impacted deaf culture in a very significant way. Technology and the media have opened my channels for the deaf to communicate with the hearing community. This communication helps to erode the isolation barrier that they have experienced for so many years. Deaf people are able to find religious materials online made specifically for them. This is both a good and bad thing, because there is a lot of good material out there, but also a lot of bad.¹¹⁹

¹¹³ Butler, Digital 232

¹¹⁴ Interview 2

¹¹⁵ Interview 1

¹¹⁶ Butler, Digital 487

¹¹⁷ Butler, Digital 487

¹¹⁸ Interview 3

¹¹⁹ Interview 1

On the topic of the society of the 21st century and deaf evangelism, Bob Ayres points out many defining traits that this generation will exhibit. Society has placed emphases on Inclusive and unique programs. They have gifts of both diversity and unity. These traits help shape the manner in which ministries seek to reach out to this community.¹²⁰

In some ways change in culture and society has not affected the deaf culture that much. “Deaf people have always been behind in the awareness of Jesus. Many deaf kids were taken to church and there was no interpreter, so they just sat there and counted tiles on the floor. Because of this they became frustrated with church.”¹²¹

The Unique Challenges of Non-Verbal Communication

One of the unique challenges of evangelizing to a person who communicates through a non-verbal language is communication gaps. Conveying a message can be difficult because of the varying levels of education of people who are deaf.¹²² There is a challenge in communicating with deaf people because some are high functioning and others are low functioning. Some have different levels of knowledge and signing with religious words. Example, some deaf children attended Christian schools and have a better understanding of religious words.¹²³ There are also many communication gaps you do not expect, with certain phrases.¹²⁴ For instance, English idiom is often difficult to translate into ASL.

In order to help with communication gaps there is a benefit to working with the hearing people who sign with the deaf person, like family and friends. “You have to remember the people who support them who know that language, like family friends and interpreters. Included include them in your work, invite them to gain knowledge, to deepen their knowledge, you need to equip them to be able to do their job.”¹²⁵ You need to remember to use different resources that are available for those situations.¹²⁶ For instance, trying to define certain words is difficult.

¹²⁰ Ayres, Digital 2084

¹²¹ Interview 3

¹²² Sampley, pg. 33

¹²³ Interview 2

¹²⁴ Interview 3

¹²⁵ Interview 1

¹²⁶ Interview 3

Working with a religious sign dictionary, pastor, or interpreter can help find the correct meaning that is trying to be conveyed.

Incorporation of Deaf People into a Hearing Worship Setting

When incorporating a deaf person in to worship one of the most challenging parts to work with are hymns.¹²⁷ Hymns often make use of older language and poetry which make them difficult to translate. The music is also challenging because the deaf person does not see the value in singing songs.¹²⁸ “They are often board and will sometimes start conversations with each other.”¹²⁹

When translating hymns it is important to try and tell a visual story. Samply gave this example using the hymn “O God our Help in Ages Past,” by Isaac Watts in her book,

English: O God our help in ages past our hope for years to come our shelter from the stormy blast and our eternal home.

Translation: O God our help up till now our hope for future our protect [agent ending] during trouble give [agent ending] heaven.¹³⁰

Translating the hymn into a form that they can understand will greatly improve the value of hymns to members who are deaf in worship.

Another difficult part of worship for people who are deaf is the liturgy. Deaf people new to the church might not understand or be frustrated with responsive readings. They often move to fast and can be frustrating. They have a hard time distinguishing when they need to copy the interpreter and when not to copy the interpreter.¹³¹ However, having screens with the responses printed on them can help them understand. Using responses that they are familiar with can also help. Regular portions of the service like the confession of sins and the creeds can help deaf people feel unity with the congregation when they are confessing them together.¹³²

Another important fact to remember is that object lessons and captions are sometimes difficult for deaf people. Often the deaf person cannot see what is happening when they are looking at the interpreter to see what is being said. “Captioning is good for hard of hearing, not

¹²⁷ Sampley, pg. 76

¹²⁸ Interview 3

¹²⁹ Interveiw

¹³⁰ Sampley, pg. 78

¹³¹ Interview 3

¹³² Interveiw 3

always good for deaf because many deaf are not good readers, an interpreter would serve better.”¹³³ Auditory and visual can be simultaneous for hearing people, but for deaf people need to see the interpreter and the facial expressions of the speaker at the same time to have a better understanding of the message being conveyed.¹³⁴

The Advantages and Dangers of Technology in Deaf Ministry

Technology has definitely made a great impact on the deaf community, in some ways it is a great advantage, but in others it can be a danger. Technology has many benefits for the deaf community, Ayres stated in his book,

Through high-speed Internet connections, Deaf people may carry on real-time, face-to-face conversations in ASL with computer video cameras. They may chat with their friends throughout the day with two-way pagers and wireless technology... There is virtually no dependency on hearing people for making phone calls. Telephone calls may now be made through the computer, either by text or through a Video Relay Service.¹³⁵

Technology offers the means to connect deaf people with deaf and hearing communities all over the world. Deaf people are able to access copious amounts of information that they were not able to just a few decades ago. Deaf people can share their feelings and ideas on deaf video blogs.¹³⁶

Technology is most certainly a great benefit to the deaf community and culture

Technology can also serve as a great tool in worship and deaf ministry too. When interviewee number one discussed technology he stated

Technology makes it possible to include deaf members in a greater degree of what a congregation has to offer, interpreters through the internet can key in on feelings. Sometimes it is forgotten that deaf people want to be included. We are serving a different population in the deaf community, deaf people who have grown up WELS feel differently about church than general deaf population.¹³⁷

Technology like video screen can assist in keeping deaf and hearing members on the same page when it comes to the liturgy. Having the ability to give a typed sermon to the interpreter or deaf visitor before the sermon is also another benefit of technology. Deaf people can communicate

¹³³ Interview 4

¹³⁴ Interview 3

¹³⁵ Ayres, Digital 2363

¹³⁶ Interview 3

¹³⁷ Interview 1

with each other through social media and texting which brings them closer together. This ability to communicate through social media also provides a great avenue to advertise for the ministry of a congregation to the deaf community. Things like hearing induction loops can help deaf people with some hearing understand the message through clearer means. Voice activated materials like Dragon Naturally Speaking and Video Remote Interpreting (VRI's) help communication if an interpreter is not available.

¹³⁸ There are many advantages to having and using technology to assist in ministry to the deaf community, but there are also some dangers.

One of the greatest dangers in deaf evangelism is the mentality that it is acceptable to take the easy route to evangelize to people who are deaf and use only a form of technology to communicate with deaf people. "Deaf people want to know that they can have a personal relationship with someone who cares about their souls."¹³⁹ On the topic of the dangers of technology Ayres stated, "Technology does not replace the touch of a friend during a time of crisis or provide someone to hang out with at the shopping mall."¹⁴⁰ Technology is a tool which assists in deaf ministry it does not, and should not replace the personal connections that need to be made in the spiritual care of members.

There is also danger that other church bodies with bad doctrine can pollute Deaf people's minds through information that they may find on the internet or media. Technology may also lead to the mindset that, "If we don't reach out someone else will."¹⁴¹

Some forms of technology might be a disadvantage because they are not properly used or setup. Remote Video Interpreting can be a disadvantage because the audio connection may not be good enough and the setup might not be done correctly. You need to have a direct audio feed so it does not echo and so it does not pick up other unwanted sound.¹⁴² Issues like these must be thought through very carefully when implementing technology into deaf ministry.

¹³⁸ Interview 2

¹³⁹ Interview 1

¹⁴⁰ Ayres, Digital 2336

¹⁴¹ Interview 1

¹⁴² Interview 3

CONCLUSION

As Christian churches we have the motivation through God's word to reach out to those who have not heard the saving message of Jesus Christ. This motivation compels us to reach out to not only those who have not heard God's word, those who are underserved. The majority members of the deaf community are both unaware of God's Word and underserved. The opportunity to evangelize and minister to the deaf community is great. However, there are many challenges that may stand in the way of evangelizing and ministry to the deaf community. These challenges do not mean that ministering to them is impossible. Ministry in the deaf community, like any other, requires planning, dedication, and the ability to adapt to serve the needs of your members. Through recognizing overcoming the obstacles and challenges and making use of the tools and strategies that are available members or the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod can successfully evangelize to the deaf community by overcoming the obstacle of the spoken word.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Sample Interview Questions

Questions for Interviews

Vocabulary:

- Deaf Culture-the social beliefs, behaviors, art, literary traditions, history, values, and shared institutions of communities that are affected by deafness and which use sign languages as the main means of communication.
- Technology- Electronic or digital products and systems used to assist a deaf person in communicating and receiving information.
- Dangers of Technology- Electronic or digital products and systems that while being helpful can exclude a member from being incorporated into the social aspect of the congregation.

1. What involvement do you have with the deaf culture?
2. What are some of the challenges and obstacles that have hindered evangelism to the deaf culture?
3. What are some of the successes that occurred in your ministry with the Deaf community?
4. How has the changing culture and society impacted the usefulness of these tactics.
5. What are some of the challenges of evangelizing to a deaf person who communicates in a different and unique way?
6. What the challenges of incorporating a deaf person into a worship service which revolves around auditory and vocal participation?
7. What are the advantages and dangers of technology and its use in reaching out to the deaf community?

Appendix B: Interview Transcripts

Interview 1

Interview with a WELS Pastor

- What involvement do you have with the deaf culture?
- College he was interested in sign and took a course offered in Watertown, Wisconsin.
- In 1976 he studied Interpreter Training at Milwaukee Area Technical college
 - The course involved experiences with deaf clubs.
 - The course also focused on signing figures of speech
- The Pastor also taught a 13 year old boy conformation class. The Student attended the classes when signed English was popular
- He has had almost no contact with the Deaf culture since 1984.
- At one of his perishes he held a deaf Bible class with about 5 deaf people. The class started because he had a deaf member. There was a local WELS teacher who was also interested in Deaf culture and sign language and she helped. She hung out at the deaf club

and she brought people from deaf club and publicized it there. The pastor commented that it was personal relationships that brought them in.

- He also did some deaf Marriage counseling.
- He became a member of the Mission deaf and hard of hearing, and helped published a religious sign dictionary called “Sign to the Lord a New Song,” in the early 2000’s.
 - o He said that knowledge of catechism, hymns, lectionary, and passages helped with his work on the dictionary
- Now he is the Head of special ministries. In this office he promotes MDHH, Explains the needs of the group to others, seeks funding for the group, guides the committee, and enables to serve in any way he can.
- What are some of the challenges and obstacles that have hindered evangelism to the deaf culture?
- It is more than a language barrier. It takes personal relationships because of the isolation; someone has to be committed to taking care of their spiritual needs. They don’t need a presentation.
- You can’t take hearing programs and make them apply to deaf people, programs need to be tailored to the deaf people you are serving. It requires someone to walk with them and help them remove barriers. Some of these barriers are; the lack of people that know the language when they get to the church, they sit by themselves to be closer to the interpreter, and there are often people who have the gifts to help, but don’t follow through.
- What are some of the successes that occurred in your ministry with the Deaf community?
- He Established signed services that have continued at Redemption Lutheran church that continue to this day
- He started a deaf bible class, which no longer exists.
- He helped write religious sign dictionary.
 - o He believes it is the largest religious dictionary ever published, but not widely used.
- How has the changing culture and society impacted the usefulness of these tactics.
- In our society we have more of an opportunity to engage the deaf community, now they are on the internet looking, we can’t be so narrow in our verbiage.
- Both deaf and blind people will be using mainstream material, They are finding simply written stuff instead of stuff specifically for the deaf,
- The isolation factor is disappearing because of the internet.
 - o People who are like minded in the ministry are no longer as isolated as they were.
- Wels could offer a streamed Sunday morning ASL message.
- At the Tower of Babel God made it so that the people could not communicate, he frustrated their language. But ever since Pentecost, people all over the world are erasing communication barriers for the sake of the gospel.”
- What are some of the challenges of evangelizing to a deaf person who communicates in a different and unique way?

You have to remember the people who support them who know that language, like family friends and interpreters. Included include them in your work, invite them to gain knowledge, to deepen their knowledge, you need to equip them to be able to do their Job.

- What the challenges of incorporating a deaf person into a worship service which revolves around auditory and vocal participation?
 - “Deaf person raised in Pentecostal church visited pilgrim, he said the worship service was boring because there is no meaning, it needs to be made inspiring, not just Praise God, praise God, praise God, we have to realize that poetry does not always translate well. It may have a great melody but it is boring”
- There should be a separate convention for interpreters to go over songs and words.
- Auditory and visual can be simultaneous for hearing people, but for deaf people need to see the interpreter and the facial expressions of the speaker to have a better understanding of the message being conveyed.
- They feel a part of things when they confess sins and speak the creed.
- Object lessons and captions are hard because the deaf person cannot see what is happening when they are looking at the interpreter to see what is being said.
- What are the advantages and dangers of technology and its use in reaching out to the deaf community?
 - a. Advantages
 - Tech makes it possible to include deaf members in a greater degree of what a congregation has to offer, interpreters through the internet can key in on feelings.
 - It helps in bible classes and counseling,
 - Sometimes it is forgotten that deaf people want to be included
 - We are serving a different population in the deaf community, deaf people who have grown up WELS feel differently about church than general deaf population.
 - b. Dangers
 - People think that they can take it easy because they can communicate through technology; deaf people want to know that they can have a personal relationship with someone who cares about their souls.
 - Other church bodies with bad doctrine can pollute their minds
 - It may lead to the mindset that, “If we don’t reach out someone else will.”
 - Each technology will shape the message and some will not be useful.

Interview 2

Interview with two members of the WELS MDHH Committee

1. What involvement do you have with the deaf culture?
 - Interviewee 1: Has a deaf brother and an uncle who was a Pastor at redemption in Milwaukee who confirmed a deaf boy in the 1970’s. And has been a member of the MDHH board for six years.
 - Interviewee 2: Member of the board of MDHH for 25 years. She has a deaf brother-in-law. She took Sign classes at a tech school.
 - Both interviewees stated that they did not have a lot of contact with the deaf culture, but they did attend a deaf club for many years.
2. What are some of the challenges and obstacles that have hindered evangelism to the deaf culture?
 - To be able to contact deaf people. There used to be directories of deaf people so it made it easier to contact them.

- Laws – such as separation of church and state, No one wants to talk about religion. The best way to spread the word is by word of mouth. Weddings and funerals also present good opportunities to share the message.
- Deaf community doesn't always want hearing people there.
 - a. They may feel that a hearing person is telling us what to do
 - b. The deaf community is Close knit, and hesitant of people coming in.
- They once sent all the WELS churches a post card asking 3 questions
 - i. Do you have anyone who is deaf in your congregation?
 - ii. Do you have anyone who is hard of hearing in your congregation?
 - iii. What can the MDHH committee do to help?
- Only 5 cards were sent back.
- It is hard to start a deaf ministry with only a few people. If there are only one or two deaf people it lacks the social aspect.
- Pastors are often reluctant to having an interpreter in the front of the congregation. They did not want them under the pulpit
- 3. What are some of the successes that occurred in your ministry with the Deaf community?
 - Redemption Lutheran church has had a deaf member who has been attending for 55 years.
 - There are deaf bible class going on in the WELS, but very few of them.
 - a. Deaf people are not afraid to ask questions in a deaf bible class as opposed to being in a hearing class. They think that hearing people know more than they do. This Bible study is led by a lay leader.
 - b. We have experienced success when deaf people tell deaf people about church.
 - c. Mt. Calvary Lutheran Church has deaf members in its choir.
 - d. There was an older deaf gentleman who belonged to their church who he passed away and many deaf people came to the funeral service. The deaf people wanted to know more about the message and continued to come. Now the church changed from offering signed services one Sunday a month to every Sunday.
 - It is important to have signed worship every Sunday worship. Otherwise, if a deaf person misses one month it turns into two months. However, it is difficult to sign every Sunday. It works best when you have more than one interpreter. It is also important to have the commitment of the deaf people to attend so you don't put in all the work and no one shows.
 - The Deaf catechism By Grace Alone
- 4. How has the changing culture and society impacted the usefulness of these tactics?
 - Stricter Privacy laws. You used to get a phone book of TTYs, now it is all texting.
- 5. What are some of the challenges of evangelizing to a deaf person who communicates in a different and unique way?
 - Trying to define certain words is difficult. And it takes a lot of studying to become a fluent interpreter. There are also many communication gaps you don't expect, with certain phrases.
 - There is a challenge in communicating with deaf people because some are high functioning and others are low functioning. Some have different levels of knowledge and signing with religious words. ex. Some deaf Children attended Christian schooling,

6. What the challenges of incorporating a deaf person into a worship service which revolves around auditory and vocal participation?
 - Some members are involved in choir. Remember if you can sign it they can do it.
 - Some hearing members don't like to see "flying hands" in the front of church.
 - Responsive readings move fast, but Screens help. Using "canned" responses help as well.
 - There might be a lag in communication if the interpreter has to interpret off of the cuff without a printed manuscript.
 - It is important to have pastor involvement.
 - The hymns are difficult to sing. They often use old language and poetic words.
7. What are the advantages and dangers of technology and its use in reaching out to the deaf community?
 - Screens help keep the deaf members on pace with the congregation in the liturgy.
 - Having a typed sermon can also help, but this may be hard for the pastor to do.
 - Deaf people can communicate with each other through social media and texting which brings them closer together.
 - Looping helps deaf people who have some hearing to hear better.
 - Voice activated stuff like Dragon Naturally Speaking and VRI's help communication if an interpreter is not available.

Interview 3

Interview with a WELS Interpreter

1. What involvement do you have with the deaf culture?
 - He is a child of deaf parents and he became Lutheran in the 5th grade. Before becoming Lutheran he was Baptist because they had deaf members. In the Lutheran church they were the only deaf people that attended the Lutheran church up until the last 10 years.
 - He is very involved in the deaf culture daily. He is the "go to guy" at living hope for deaf ministry.
 - The church holds a Bible study for the deaf on Tuesdays with about 14 deaf attendees.
 - He also taught at a residential school for the deaf.
2. What are some of the challenges and obstacles that have hindered evangelism to the deaf culture?
 - Isolation- deaf people being separated from the rest of the hearing congregation – the deaf people who show up now have friends and they don't feel that isolation anymore.
 - Communication barrier between the members' deaf, hearing members, and pastors.
 - Having an interpreter every Sunday helps this barriers
 - The Order of worship can hinder deaf evangelism. His church has a contemporary service.
 - Deaf people don't get why we have the order of worship, liturgy. They understand the reasons for the things that we say. For example when we sing "Holy, holy, holy" it seems redundant. They don't know why everyone is speaking is speaking all of a sudden. Deaf people that they don't fit in. Sometimes they just sit through the worship to get to the sermon. It is often hard to explain concepts like the sacraments.
 - Deaf people are often frustrated with songs because they take up a lot of time.
 - Hearing member are often unsure of how to interact with deaf members.
 - The deaf members often stay to themselves.

3. What are some of the successes that occurred in your ministry with the Deaf community?
 - Establishing a deaf Bible study in the last year.
 - Advertising the deaf Bible studies on tc deaf .org
4. How has the changing culture and society impacted the usefulness of these tactics.
 - The change in culture and society has not affected the deaf culture that much because deaf people have always been behind in the awareness of Jesus. Many deaf kids were taken to church and there was no interpreter, “So they just sat there and counted tiles on the floor.” Because of this they became frustrated with church.
5. What are some of the challenges of evangelizing to a deaf person who communicates in a different and unique way?
 - There is a challenge to find someone who knows how to sign the religious signs
 - Communication gaps in education often prove to be a struggle to relay the message.
 - The church also ministers to two people who are deaf and blind.
 - You need to have the resources to tap into for different situations.
6. What the challenges of incorporating a deaf person into a worship service which revolves around auditory and vocal participation?
 - Responsive readings are frustrating. They have a hard time knowing when to copy the interpreter and when not to copy the interpreter.
 - The music is also challenging because the deaf person doesn’t see the value in singing songs. They are often board and will sometimes start conversations with each other.
7. What are the advantages and dangers of technology and its use in reaching out to the deaf community?
 - Large screen are a huge benefit, because it allow the deaf person to fallow along
 - Remote video interpreting can be a disadvantage because the audio connection is not good enough and the setup might not be done correctly. You need to have a direct audio feed so it does not echo and so it does not pick up other unwanted sound.
 - He sees more advantages then disadvantages with technology.
 - Signed deaf bible app is also a good resource where they can see the bible signed.
 - There are also video blogs where deaf people can communicate their ideas and beliefs. The video blogs can be both an advantage and disadvantage.

Interview 4

A WELS parent of a deaf child and member of the MDHH committee

1. What involvement do you have with the deaf culture?
 - Little to none
2. What are some of the challenges and obstacles that have hindered evangelism to the deaf culture?
 - Reading and signing ASL.
3. What are some of the successes that occurred in your ministry with the Deaf community?
 - Did none
4. How has the changing culture and society impacted the usefulness of these tactics.
 - NA
5. What are some of the challenges of evangelizing to a deaf person who communicates in a different and unique way?

- Understanding that person and having that person understand me, feeling inadequate at not being able to communicate.

6. What the challenges of incorporating a deaf person into a worship service which revolves around auditory and vocal participation?

- Making the service more visual, providing necessary interpreters for all situations.

7. What are the advantages and dangers of technology and its use in reaching out to the deaf community?

- Captioning is good for hard of hearing, not always good for deaf because many deaf are not good readers – Her friend comments. She knows people who are very ASL and are not good readers. When our family went to the WI state Hearing Loss Association of America state convention in Madison this fall, Brian’s hearing friend who knows ASL and was going to the convention too (she has Meniere’s Disease—ringing in hears and hearing loss) asked if I had requested interpreter for Brian. I said that everything would be captioned (he’s a good reader). She said, “That’s so tiring, interpreter is better.” To my relief, sessions at the convention were captioned and interpreted.

- Dangers are that technology is not personal, even VRI (video remote interpreting), like in-person interpreting.

- True ASL deaf people are not speech readers, so the hearing person who does not know ASL is at disadvantage again.

Interview 5

Interview with a LCMS pastor

I was able to speak with a Missouri Synod pastor who had connections to the mission work being done with the deaf. This interview did not follow my normal format because he mainly wanted to point me in the right direction to find better information.

The Pastor pointed me to the Mill Neck School and their website. He said that the Mill Neck School was a service organization partnership of the LCMS. The Mill Neck School has a LCMS chaplain on staff.

He also told me about the Deaf Institute of Theology where they train deaf people to be pastors or to serve in their congregations. He did state that they have not had anyone enrolled in the program in quite some time.

He also told me about the website Deafpah.org which is run by the LCMS to educate both deaf and hearing people in serving the deaf community.